

# ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S

## mystery magazine

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*Travelers usually make small talk, to pass the time, rather than to cultivate acquaintances who may ripen into friends. One word leads to another, however, and suddenly the scene changes, does it not?*

**T**HIS is the first time I've ever been up in an airplane," Mrs. Raleigh said.

Mrs. Borman's lips begrudged a thin smile. "I've flown to St. Louis twice. Before I was married."

Mrs. Raleigh had a round face and small brown eyes. "Just call me Bernice."

"Stella," Mrs. Borman said. "I'm visiting my mother in Pasadena."

"I have nobody out there," Bernice said. "But I've always wanted

to visit California. While I'm still young."

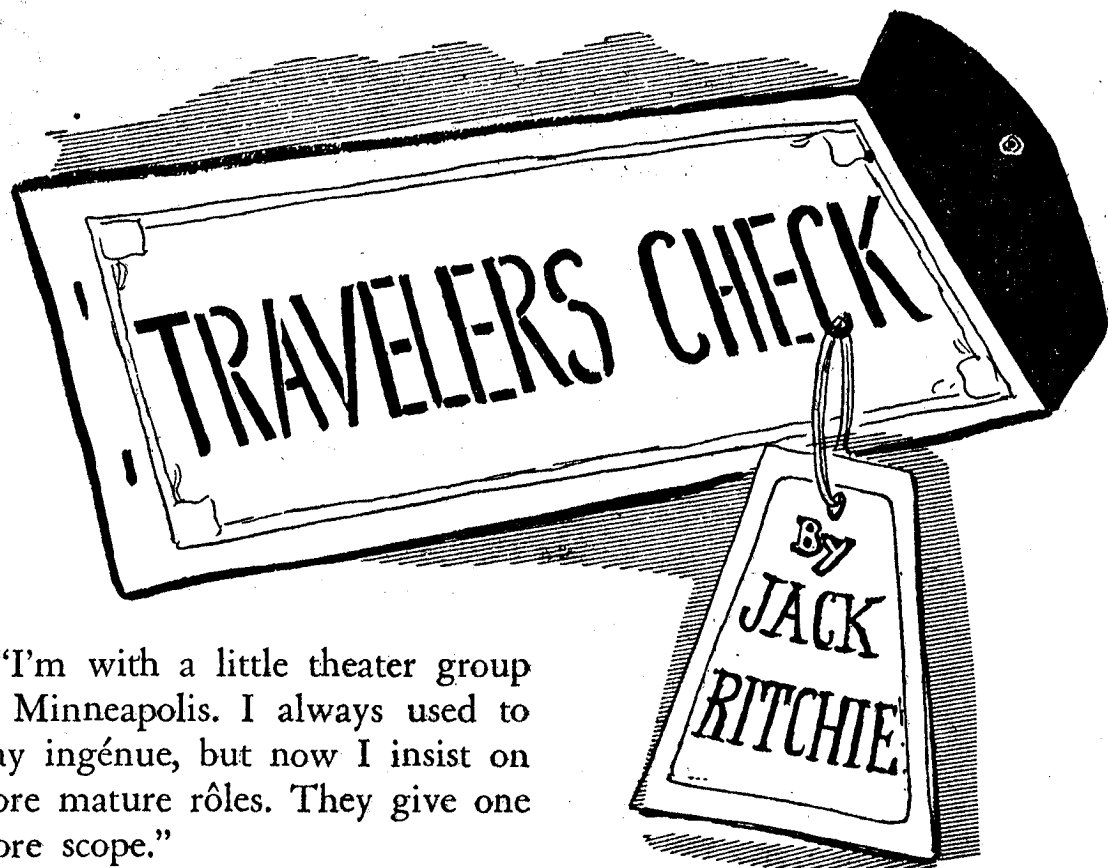
Stella examined her for a flickering moment and decided not to comment on the last statement. After all, they would be in adjacent seats for some five hours.

Bernice giggled slightly. "I'll probably drop in at Hollywood. You can never tell what might happen."

"No," Stella said dryly. "You can't."



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"I'm with a little theater group in Minneapolis. I always used to play ingénue, but now I insist on more mature rôles. They give one more scope."

"Usually my mother visits me in Chicago," Stella said. "And stays for a month or two every year."

"I suppose I really should have taken a train," Bernice said. "Henry—that's my husband—is in railroads. He could have arranged some sort of a pass or discount."

"My husband Walter's in railroads too. A very responsible position. But I prefer to travel by plane."

"This is the air age," Bernice said brightly.

Stella agreed. "You save so much time."

They were silent for half a minute and then Bernice said, "Do you have any children, Stella?"

"No."

"I don't either. Perhaps some time, but right now I have to think of my figure."

"My brother has a boy," Stella said, and the memory seemed to stiffen her lips. "Eight years old and I have to watch him like a hawk when they visit our apartment. He can do all kinds of damage."

"We live in the suburbs of Minneapolis," Bernice said. "A whole quarter acre, ranch style."

"My furniture is cherrywood," Stella said. "Twelve hundred dollars just for the bedroom set. One scratch could absolutely ruin it."

"Everybody seems to have two

or three children in our neighborhood. So noisy and they tie a person down."

"He spilled an ice cream cone on the rug the last time we saw him," Stella said. "I told Walter not to buy him one."

"We don't go in much for furniture. I take acting lessons. They're very expensive, but I believe in improving the mind and developing oneself."

Stella shifted her purse. "I told Walter I was going to Pasadena this year instead of having my mother come to Chicago. I thought he'd put up an argument, but he got that sneaky look on his face and said, 'Why not? Let's kill two birds with one stone.'"

Bernice sighed. "I had to argue and argue with Henry, but this year he gave in sudden-like and bought me a ticket. You have to keep after a husband in order to get him to provide what you want."

"Imagine Walter using an expression like that," Stella said. "I almost changed my mind about going. Just to teach him a lesson."

"Gregori—he's the famous movie director, you know—once saw one of our plays at the high school auditorium. That was in '57. He complimented the whole cast and I think he'll remember me."

"My mother has orange trees

right on the front lawn," Stella said. "And two fig trees in the back."

Bernice patted back a strand of blonde hair. "Every Thursday we have a play reading at our house. I always send Henry down to his basement workshop. He's not interested in intellectual things and he sort of gets in the way."

"Whenever I have my friends over," Stella said, "I send Walter to the movies. Otherwise he just sits there like a log and sometimes even goes to sleep."

"Henry tinkers around in the basement."

"We don't have a basement," Stella said. "Apartment houses don't have basements except for the janitor and storage. So I send Walter to the movies. It's better than him drinking."

Bernice nodded. "That's why I let Henry clutter up the basement."

Stella frowned. "But once in a while I don't think Walter goes to the movies. I can smell it on his breath. Even with the peppermint."

Bernice thought about that. "Henry drinks once in a while too, if I don't watch him."

"Men can be such weaklings," Stella said. "I have to make all the decisions in my house."

"Yesterday I went down to Henry's workshop," Bernice said, "And I asked him what in the

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world he was doing staying up until after midnight."

"Walter doesn't like Mother," Stella said. "But that's no call for him to use an expression like, 'killing two birds with one stone'."

"Henry smiled dirty-like, the way he sometimes does, and he said he was making a bomb. Imagine saying that? I just know he'd been drinking."

"I think Walter drinks when he's away," Stella said. "He's away from home about half the week. His job, you know."

"So is Henry," Bernice said. "He's an engineer and his run is from Minneapolis to Chicago."

Stella's mouth indicated surprise. "It's a small world. Walter's an engineer too and he has the same run. Perhaps the two of them know each other?"

"That could be." Bernice laughed slightly. "Henry once said that one of the advantages of being an engineer is that you could have a woman at either end of the line."

There were approximately fifteen seconds of silence and then

they looked at each other sharply.

Stella spoke first. "Walter weighs about one-sixty and he's losing his hair."

Bernice seemed to pale. "Henry has blue eyes and wears gold-rimmed spectacles."

Stella lost color too. "Walter has a bridge on the lower right hand side."

Bernice closed her eyes. "Henry has a mole on his left hip."

And then, of course, Bernice remembered that Henry had insisted on packing her suitcases and that they were now in the luggage compartment in the rear of the plane.

And perhaps one of them had a little device that went *tick, tick, tick*.

They reached the pilot's compartment at 8:39 and began their frantic story.

In the cab of the Diesel making its run from Minneapolis to Chicago, the engineer glanced at his watch for the tenth time in the last five minutes.

At 8:40, he smiled.

Broadly.

